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Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Position
<u>RAISED S.B. 70</u> : AN ACT CONCERNING THE PRESERVATION OF LANDS UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (DEEP) AND THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (DoAg).	Support

Co-Chairs Meyer, Gentile and Members of the Environment Committee:

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first conservation organization established in Connecticut (1895), and our original charter included the goal of establishing State Forests and Parks. Over the last century, CFPA's Board and Members have worked to protect iconic State treasures such as Gillette Castle, Talcott Mountain, Peoples Forest, Sherwood Island, Rocky Neck, Sleeping Giant, and many more.

Today, I am here to thank you for raising S.B 70 and to testify in strong support of it. This year, Connecticut's State Parks are celebrating their 100 year anniversary, and as part of the State Parks Centennial it is fitting to discuss the protection in perpetuity of the conservation, recreation, and other unique values for which these State treasures were established for public enjoyment. Though I'll focus my remarks on Parks, CFPA also supports the equally important goal in S.B. 70 of protecting State-owned agricultural lands in perpetuity.

Two recent reports published on the State Parks by UConn (2011) and the Program Review and Investigations Committee (2014) demonstrate that Connecticut State Parks are enormously valuable to the State and should be better staffed and funded. At the same time, CEQ's report "Preserved But Maybe Not" makes it clear that the immense resource values showcased in our State Parks, Forests, and State-owned agricultural lands can be traded, sold, or given away too easily. Public lands should not be so vulnerable to the whims of the dominant political party or to short-term interests. These are the peoples' lands and must be protected for the people. Your constituents assumed these lands were already protected, and I urge you to ensure that they are.

New York and Massachusetts passed Constitutional Amendments to protect State-owned conservation lands, and this would be the best way to protect public lands for the people of the Constitution state. In the short-term, however, S.B. 70 is important to do the following:

- Classify lands under the custody and control of DEEP and DoAg as "high conservation value" unless the Commissioners make a written determination to the contrary;
- Clarify that it is the policy of the State to preserve these public lands and their resource values;
- Require DEEP and DoAg to place a conservation restriction on the deed for high conservation value lands;
- Make the state land conveyance process more transparent with a critical element being DEEP and DoAg properties in the Conveyance Bill having a public hearing before the Environment Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be glad to respond to any questions you may have.